***The Sacrament of Reconciliation: For Me and For My Students***

***Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. CCC 1440***

When I was in school, confession was an important sacrament and one that was engaged in weekly before participating in Holy Communion. This was fairly regularly monitored at home and on Sundays. I remember my Act of Contrition – we memorized it like a poem - and to this day, I wonder why many young Catholic students are not required to memorize this petition. I would say the Act at night as a daily prayer.

My experience throughout my faith journey has changed and grown. For many of my young adult years, though I remained a practicing Catholic, I forgo formal Confession and I made several excuses for not celebrating it. I would reason that I had not committed any mortal sins that needed forgiving. I would reason (for a certain period in my life) that there was no need to “confess” through another person – I could do so directly with God in my prayers. I never really stopped asking forgiveness of God – I just felt too ashamed or embarrassed to reveal myself to a parish priest. Also to consider was the amount of moving around I did and for a long time – I did not consider myself “tied” to a parish community. I felt little responsibility to a parish community.

When I became a teacher, I found myself in the position of role model! As FSL teacher, I rarely was asked to take a class to an organized opportunity for Confession. But, one year – I did have responsibility for a 7/8 class when it was “their time” to attend church for Confession. I, without thinking, went forward first – knowing that if the children were going to make their Confessions – I would also make mine (albeit for the first time in probably 18 years!) As I approached the parish priest (seated on the altar and in the open) I somewhat sheepishly reported it had been “many years since my last Confession”…Since then – I have begun to go semi-regularly. I do not like the idea of the Confessional (“anonymous” box) – I have participated in face-to-face Confession either with my students or 1:1 with my parish priest. I am up to about twice yearly now!

I like the idea of “Celebrating the mercy of God” with the Vatican II model: The “Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution”. I think that a celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation is the way to go – sacraments are a way of worshiping and this seems more closely linked to worship than other forms of “confession of sins” in secret and shame.

I have and do explain to my students and other children in my care that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a chance for us to “make things right with God”. I talk about how bad feelings can get between us and if we let if fester, we end up with a great big ball of yarn to sort out before we can be happy and loving again. I like to say that telling a priest our sins helps to get things off our chest and also helps us to remember next time not to do those things that are hurtful again. Speaking things out loud makes a memory and helps to acknowledge that they happened and then, speaking the words of forgiveness and thanksgiving helps us to feel healed and united with Jesus.